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(SOV TROOPS)

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WASHINGTON (UPI) -- THE DEFENSE DEPARTMENT SAID TODAY THERE MAY HAVE BEEN "A MODEST INCREASE" IN SOVIET TROOPS STATIONED IN CUBA IN RECENT MONTHS.

BUT DEPARTMENT SPOKESMAN TOM ROSS SAID HE COULD NOT REVEAL THE EXTENT OF THE INCREASE BECAUSE THE FIGURES ARE CLASSIFIED.

ROSS NOTED DEFENSE SECRETARY HAROLD BROWN ADDRESSED THE ISSUE OF SOVIET TROOPS IN CUBA WHEN HE TESTIFIED IN CLOSED SESSION BEFORE THE SENATE FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE JULY 17.

SEN. FRANK CHURCH, CHAIRMAN OF THE PANEL, ISSUED A STATEMENT AFTERWARDS QUOTING BROWN AS SAYING THERE WAS "NO EVIDENCE OF A SUBSTANTIAL INCREASE" OF SOVIET TROOPS.

ASKED TO EXPLAIN THE MEANING OF BROWN'S STATEMENT, ROSS TOLD A PENTAGON NEWS BRIEFING: "THERE MIGHT HAVE BEEN A MODEST INCREASE IN SOVIET TROOPS."

THE STATUS OF SOVIET MILITARY PERSONNEL HAS BEEN A SUBJECT OF CONCERN TO SEN. DICK STONE, D-FLA., WHO HAS RAISED THE QUESTION OF WHETHER THE RUSSIANS HAVE VIOLATED A 1970 UNDERSTANDING WITH THE UNITED STATES OVER CUBA.

THE RUSSIANS, UNDER THE UNDERSTANDING, TOLD THE UNITED STATES THEY WERE NOT BUILDING A MILITARY BASE IN CUBA.

THE CARTER ADMINISTRATION HAS STATED ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS IT DOES NOT CONSIDER THE SOVIETS IN VIOLATION OF THE 1970 UNDERSTANDING OR THE 1962 AGREEMENT UNDER WHICH THE SOVIET WITHDREW THEIR MEDIUM RANGE MISSILES FROM CUBA.

STILL, STONE HAS ASSERTED ON THE BASIS OF CLASSIFIED BRIEFINGS THE RUSSIANS HAVE ESTABLISHED A MILITARY COMMAND STRUCTURE ON THE ISLAND.

CONCERN OVER SOVIET ACTIVITIES THERE WAS ALSO RAISED BY HENRY KISSINGER, THE FORMER SECRETARY OF STATE, IN SENATE TESTIMONY LAST WEEK.

KISSINGER SAID SOVIET PILOTS HAVE BEEN FLYING AIR DEFENSE MISSIONS FOR CUBA, THUS FREEING CUBA PILOTS TO GO ON EXPEDITIONARY MISSIONS TO AFRICA.

BUT DEFENSE SOURCES SAID IT WAS NOT COMPLETELY CLEAR WHETHER THE SOVIET PILOTS WERE FLYING REGULAR AIR DEFENSE MISSIONS, OR WHETHER THEY WERE ENGAGED IN TRAINING EXERCISES.

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